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ABSTRACT

When the state legislators of Illinois mandated a full-scale statewide assessment program in reading/language arts, the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE) made its stand clear: that tests for Illinois students must be created, designed, and executed by Illinois English/language arts educators, and that a writing sample was an obvious and necessary part of such a test. IATE exerted significant influence for change, and a writing sample is now part of the assessment process in Illinois. (SR)

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The IATE Role in IGAP Writing Assessment

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In the spring of 1991, students in grades three, six, eight and eleven will compose a sample of writing as part of the Illinois Goals Assessment tool has ben a strong commitment of IATE from the start of the assessment process in Illinois.

In 1983, prior to the passage of reform legislation, the Illinois State Board of Education created the Illinois Inventory of Educational Progress. The IIEP was to assess knowledge, skills, current trends and factors affecting student achievement. A significant development of IIEP was the naming of the Language Arts Advisory Committee, on whose roster IATE members are prominent. Under the guidance of ISBE consultant, Carman Woods Chapman, this committee make a strong commitment to writing. The publication of WRITE ON, ILLINOIS! continues to serve as both an in-service tool and advisory document to assessment testing in Illinois.

IATE make perhaps its strongest statement on the importance of writing instruction through the work of its English Basic Skills Task Force. In a series of six brochures published in 1985 by the Illinois State Board of Education, this Task Force provided information on the process of writing and gave suggestions for programs of writing across the curriculum.

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Public Act 84-126, effective August 1, 1985, amended the

school code of Illinois to include a requirement that goals for learning be identified and assessed, both at local and state levels. Unfortunately, the state legislators did not view the standardized testing used by local school districts nor the random sample assessment testing being done by the IIEP as sufficient for its purposes and mandated a full scale assessment program to begin in 1988 with reading/language arts.

The large numbers of students to be tested (at first set for grades 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12) meant that the scoring of a writing sample would be cost prohibitive. Therefore, the first test proposals were machine score/test company creations. The questions were literature and language rule specific and focused on isolated skills. Alarmed at the prospect of such a test, IATE began at once to make its philosophical stand clear: tests being given to Illinois students must be created, designed and executed by Illinois English/language arts educators. To test communications skills, a student must be asked to communicate. A writing sample obvious and necessary.

IATE exerted significant influence to change through participation on the Language Arts Advisory Committee, and by personal contacts with the ISBW office of Program Planning and Development, members of the Illinois School Board and Illinois state legislators. At the 1987 IATE fall conference, Assistant Superintendent Lyndon Wharton, head of the Department of School

Improvement Services, announced to the concerned assembly that the Illinois assessment would include a writing sample after all.

IATE takes seriously its constitutional charge: "to organize teachers of English in Illinois for united action in matters of mutual interest." We are proud of the supporting role played IATE in making Illinois nationally recognized for the quality of its assessment testing program.

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